

Customers approve S-26 engine

SAFIRE AIRCRAFT says customer reaction to selection of a previously unknown engine supplier for its S-26 personal jet has been positive. The company is proceeding with plans for an initial public offering (IPO) to raise funds for certification of the aircraft.

The West Palm Beach, Florida-based company, which expects to have taken deposits on up to 500 aircraft by the end of this month, says it has been contacted by 150 customers seeking more information on the engine and its supplier, Agilis Engines (*Flight International*, 14-20 March).

Safire designed the S-26 around

Williams International's FXJ-2 small turbofan, but switched suppliers after the engine manufacturer signed an exclusive agreement to power Eclipse Aviation's competing personal jet (*Flight International*, 7-13 March).

Williams' contract to certificate a derivative of the FXJ-2 to power the Eclipse 500 will delay availability to other customers of the NASA-sponsored small turbofan. Having been led to believe the Williams engine would be available in 2003, Safire has switched to Agilis to stay on schedule.

The company is also "completely convinced" that Agilis can build a

better engine, says Safire president Michael Margaritoff. "Most of our customers are pilots. They understand that by optimising both the aircraft and the engine we will get the best aircraft," he says.

Safire is going ahead with plans for an IPO later this year to raise the \$30 million needed to type-certify the S-26. A separate and parallel effort is under way to raise "more than \$100 million" to build a factory and get the production certificate, says Margaritoff.

Agilis, an engineering services company formed in 1993 by ex-Pratt & Whitney employees and based in Palm Beach Gardens,

Florida, will be responsible for raising the funding required for certification and production of its engine, Margaritoff says.

Safire continues to take refundable \$8,000 deposits on the \$800,000 S-26 at an impressive rate. It booked 118 orders in February and expects to take 140-150 this month. Since announcing that unknown Agilis will be the engine supplier, Safire says it has "not lost one deposit".

Buyers will not be required to make non-refundable downpayments until after the first flight, due in 2002. Certification and first deliveries are planned for 2003. □

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ BUSH REINSTATED

The US Federal Aviation Administration has reinstated the type certificate for Found Aircraft Canada's FBA-2C1 Bush Hawk light utility aircraft. The first production Bush Hawk flew early this month at the company's new plant at Georgian Bay Airport, near Toronto, Ontario.

■ HELIPORT OPENS

An unlicensed heliport was opened in Cardiff, UK, on 15 March. The £3.5 million (\$5.5 million) facility has a 300m (1,000ft) runway and claims to be "the first purpose-built heliport in Europe capable of all-weather flights".

■ COVERAGE EXTENDED

The US Federal Aviation Administration has agreed to maintain VHF direction-finding (DF) equipment at 111 sites until 2010. The FAA had planned to decommission all DF sites in 1997, but at the request of user groups it conducted a study to identify locations still requiring coverage. As a result, DF will be retained and upgraded at 103 locations and eight new sites added.

Be-200 tests to resume



BETA AIR, a joint venture between Beriev, the Irkutsk Aircraft Production Association (IAPO) and private investors, plans to resume water runs of its Be-200 twinjet amphibian this month at the Ghelendjik maritime-aviation flight test base on the Black Sea.

The second Be-200 prototype, in assembly at the IAPO plant, will join the flight-test programme in November.

Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations has ordered eight Be-200s for search and rescue and firefighting missions.

The Be-200 will also be available in air ambulance, maritime patrol and passenger versions. China and South Korea are believed to be interested in the maritime patrol Be-200, while the passenger version is intended for Malaysia and the Philippines. □

AASI secures extra cash for Jetcruzer certification costs

ADVANCED Aerodynamics & Structures (AASI) has raised the first \$5 million of a \$10 million cash injection needed to complete the long-awaited US Federal Aviation Administration certification of the Jetcruzer 500 turboprop, as well as to ramp up its Long Beach, California, factory site for mass production.

A group of investors is raising the cash from the sale of cumulative convertible preferred stock from AASI and will help fund completion of work on a composite fuselage for pressurisation tests. Additional cash will be used to help complete maximum cruise-speed trials on the initial Jetcruzer, which has accumulated more than 1,000h of flight tests. AASI says all tests are due to be completed by the end of this month, with FAA certification expected around June. Initial deliveries will begin in "the latter part of 2000", it adds.

The company has a backlog of 182 firm orders, worth about \$220 million, and plans to bolster its orderbook with a fractional-ownership scheme being developed (*Flight International*, 17-23 January). The pressurised, single-engine six-seater is priced at \$1.4 million. □